

MAXIMS OF ETERNITY;
OR, MEDITATIONS FOR EVERY DAY IN THE WEEK¹



By St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

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¹ These meditations are an excellent summary of the foregoing Considerations on the Last Things of man. As they contain nothing exclusively proper to the days of the week to which they have been assigned, they may also be used at other times. They are substantially the same as those that are found in the works of Father Sarnelli (*Il Cristiano santificato*) and in those of St. Leonard of Port Maurice (*Via del paradiso*), and perhaps elsewhere, since neither appears to be the author of them. St. Alphonsus arranged them according to his own method, and inserted them in the first work that he published, about the year 1747, under the title of “*Smaller Spiritual Works*” (*Oferette spirituali*).—ED.

MEDITATION FOR SUNDAY.

The End of Man.

I.

Consider, O my soul! that the being which you enjoy was given to you by God: he created you to his own image, without any merit on your part; he adopted you for his child by baptism; he loved you more than the most affectionate parent could have loved you; he has made you all you are, that you might know him, love him, and serve him in this life, and thereby arrive at the eternal possession of him in heaven. Hence you did not come into this world for the sake of enjoyment to grow rich and powerful, to eat, drink, and sleep like irrational animals, but solely to love your God and to work out your eternal salvation. And is this the object that I have hitherto had in view? Oh! how unfortunate have I been, in having thought of everything else rather than of my last end. O God! I beg of Thee, in the name and for the love of Jesus, to grant that I may begin a new life of perfect holiness and conformity to Thy divine will.

II.

Consider what deep remorse and bitter regret you will feel at the hour of death, if, during life, you have not devoted yourself to the service of God. How great will be your disappointment when, at the close of your days, you will perceive that nothing remains at that sorrowful moment of all your goods, of all your pleasures, and of all your earthly glory, but a shadow that flies before you, and a bitter remembrance which pursues you! What will be your consternation when you will discover that, for the sake of miserable vanities, you have lost your God, your soul, and your salvation, without the possibility of being able to repair your misfortune? O despair! O cruel torment! you will then see the value of the time that you are losing; but it will be too late. Gladly would you then purchase time at the price of all you have; but you will not be able

to do so. Oh! how full of bitterness and sorrow will that day be for every soul that has not loved and served the Lord!

III.

Consider the general disregard of men for their last end. Their ordinary thoughts are upon the accumulation of wealth, the gratification of their senses, parties of pleasure, amusement, and festivity. They think nothing of God or of his service; they do nothing for the salvation of their souls: they regard the affair of salvation as a trifle not worthy of notice. Thus, O deplorable misfortune! the greater part of Christians, by indulging in foolish pleasures and criminal gratifications, precipitate themselves into hell. O man! you take much pains to damn yourself, and will you do nothing for your salvation? Listen to the dying sentiments of a Secretary of State of one of the kings of England: “How great,” said he, “is my misfortune: I have used many sheets of paper in writing letters for my sovereign, and, alas! I have not used one to help me in the recollection of my sins, that I might make a good confession!” Listen to the death-bed sentiments of a king of Spain: “Oh that I had spent my life in a desert, occupied in serving God, and had never been a king!” But to what do these sighs and lamentations then serve, but to augment the horrors of despair? Learn, then, this day, at the expense of others, to devote yourself to the salvation of your soul: remember well that all your actions, all your words, and all your thoughts, that are not directed to God, are entirely lost. Oh! it is time then to amend your life. Do not wait, therefore, to be convinced of this till you arrive at the gates of eternity, and the jaws of hell: it will be then too late. O my God! pardon me all the errors of my life: I love Thee above all things. I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart, for all my sins. O Mary! my hope, intercede with Jesus in my behalf.

MEDITATION FOR MONDAY.

The Importance of our Last End.

I.

Consider, O man! how important it is to you to save your soul. Your dearest interests are there concerned, because, if you attain salvation, you will be eternally* happy in the enjoyment of every good both of soul and body; but, in losing it, you lose your soul and body; heaven and God: you will be eternally miserable, eternally damned. Your only important, your only necessary affair, therefore, is to serve your God and to save your soul. Do not, then, O Christian! think of serving your passions now, and of giving yourself to God hereafter. Oh, how many has this false and deceitful hope precipitated into hell! Thousands of sinners have flattered themselves with the hope of future repentance; but the day in which they hoped never arrived, and they are now suffering without resource the torments of the damned. And who amongst them all ever thought of falling into that place of woe? Which of them had not the intention of saving his soul? But God curses him that sins in the hope of pardon.¹ You say perhaps, within yourself, I will commit this sin and then repent: but are you sure that time will be allowed you for repentance? You may die the moment you have sinned. By sinning you lose the grace of God; and what if you never more recover it? God shows mercy to those who fear him, but not to those who contemn and despise him.² Think not, therefore, that it will cost you no more to repent of and confess three sins than to repent of and confess one sin. No: in this thought you are deceived; God might pardon you a first or a second sin, but not a third. He has patience with the sinner for a time, but not forever.³ When the measure of iniquity is filled up, his mercy ceases, and he punishes the impenitent sinner either by death, or by abandoning him to a reprobate sense, in which state he goes on from sin to sin without remorse, and at length is precipitated into hell. O Christian! Attend seriously to this. It is time you should put an end to your disorders and

return to God; you should fear lest this will be the last warning that he will ever send you. You have offended him long enough, and he has borne with you long enough in your sins: tremble, then, lest he should forsake you after the next mortal sin. Oh! How many souls has this striking thought of eternity caused to retire from the disorders and dangers of the world, to live in cloisters, solitudes, and deserts! Unfortunate sinner that I have been! what is the fruit of all my crimes? — a conscience gnawed with despair, a troubled heart, a soul overwhelmed with grief, hell deserved, and God lost! Ah! my God, my heavenly Father! Bind me to Thy love.

¹ Maledictus homo qui peccat in spe.

² “Et misericordia ejus ... timentibus eum.”—Luke, i. 50

³ “In plenitudine peccatorum puniat.”—2 Mach. vi. 14.

II.

Consider, O man! that this affair of eternity is above all others the most neglected. Mankind have time to think of everything but God and salvation. If a man of the world is advised to frequent the sacraments, or to spend a quarter of an hour daily in meditation, he will immediately say: I have a family to provide for, I have my business to attend to, | have sufficient to keep me employed. Good God! and have you not a soul to save? Will your riches and your family be able to assist you at the hour of your death, or deliver you from hell if you are condemned? No, no: flatter not yourself that you are able to reconcile God and the world, heaven and sin together. Salvation is not to be attained by a life of indolence and ease. It is necessary to use violence and to make great efforts in order to obtain the crown of immortality. How many Christians have flattered themselves with the idea of serving God and saving their souls hereafter, who are at this moment, and will forever be, in the flames of hell! How great is the folly of men in attending to what will so shortly terminate, and thinking so little of that state which will never end! Ah, Christian! put your affairs in order; reflect that your all is at

stake: remember that, in a very short time, your body will be deposited in the earth, and your soul will go to dwell in the house of eternity. How dreadful, then, will be your misfortune if you are condemned to an eternity of woe! Reflect well on this; for then you can have no remedy.

III.

Consider and say within yourself: I have a soul, and if I lose it all is lost; I have a soul, and if in losing it I were to gain the whole world, what would it profit me? I have a soul, but if I lose it, although I were to arrive at the highest pinnacle of glory, of what advantage will it be to me? If I hoard up riches, if I get forward in the world, but in the end lose my soul, what will be my consolation? Where are now. the dignities, pleasures, and vanities of those great ones of the world whose bodies are mouldering in the dust and whose souls are a prey to the flames of hell? Since, then, I have a soul, and only one, to save, and if I lose it once it is lost forever, I ought to endeavor to save it. This is an affair of the highest importance to me. Eternal happiness and eternal misery are at stake. O my God! I am forced to acknowledge with shame and confusion that I have hitherto blindly wandered astray from Thee: I have scarcely ever thought seriously of saving my soul. O my Father! Save me, through Jesus Christ. I am willing to part with everything here, provided I do not lose Thee. O Mary, my surest hope! save me by thy powerful intercession.

MEDITATION FOR TUESDAY.

Mortal Sin.

I.

Consider, O my soul! that having been created to love God, you have: rebelled against him, and thereby been guilty of the basest ingratitude. You have treated him like an enemy; you have despised his grace and

friendship. You were aware how much sin offends him, and still you have committed it. Yes, you have turned your back on God; you have insulted him; you have in a manner raised your hand to strike him; you have saddened his Holy Spirit. The man who sins says to God, if not in words, at least in effect: Begone from me: I will not serve Thee, I will not acknowledge Thee for my God: the God whom I adore is this pleasure, this interest, this revenge. Such has been the language of your heart every time that you have preferred any creature to God. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi could not conceive how a Christian could knowingly commit a mortal sin. O you who are reading these lines, what are your sentiments? How many mortal sins have you committed? O my God! Pardon me, have mercy on me: I detest all my sins; I love Thee, and grieve sincerely for the insults that I have offered to Thee, who are deserving of infinite love.

II.

Consider that God thus spoke to your heart at the moment you were offending him: My son, I am your God, who created you and redeemed you with the price of my blood. I forbid you, then, to commit that sin under pain of incurring my eternal displeasure. But in yielding to the temptation you have replied: Lord, I will not obey Thee; I am resolved to gratify my passions; I value not Thy friendship. *Thou hast said, I will not serve.*¹ Ah! my God: and this I have done many, perhaps thousands of times. How couldst Thou bear with my insults? Why did I not die rather than live to offend Thee? But, O infinite goodness! I will do so no more; henceforth I will love Thee with all my heart. Give me perseverance; give me Thy holy love.

¹ “Dixisti: Non serviam.”—Jer. xl. 20.

III.

Consider, O my soul! that, when sins reach a certain number, they cause God to abandon the sinner. *The Lord patiently expecteth that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of sins. If,*

*therefore, you are again tempted to return to your sins, say no more within yourself, I will commit this one, and will then repent.*¹ For what if the Lord should instantly strike you dead? or what if he should forsake you forever? What has been the fate of thousands who have thus lost the grace of God? They flattered themselves with the hope of pardon; but death surprised them, and hell enveloped them in its flames. Tremble, then, lest your fate be the same. Those who abuse the goodness of God in order to offend him are undeserving of his mercy. After the multitude of crimes that he has pardoned you, you have too much reason to fear. that, if you relapse into mortal sin, he will pardon you no more. - Thank him, then, a thousand times for having borne patiently with you until now, and form the resolution rather to die than to offend him any more. Say frequently to him: My God! I have already offended Thee enough: the remainder of my life shall be spent in loving Thee and in bewailing my past ingratitude. O my Jesus! I wish to love Thee; grant me the grace to do so. O Blessed Virgin, my Mother! assist me by thy prayers. Amen.

¹ “Dominus patienter expectat, ut, cum iudicii dies advenerit, in plenitudine peccatorum puniat.”—2 Mach. vi. 14.

MEDITATION FOR WEDNESDAY.

Death.

I.

Consider that this life must soon terminate. The sentence is already passed: You must die. Death is certain, but the moment of it is uncertain: we know not when it will come. But to how many casualties and accidents is human life constantly exposed? The bleeding of an artery, a stroke of apoplexy, the bite of a venomous animal, an inundation, an earthquake, a thunderbolt, and numberless other causes that we can neither foresee nor prevent, may deprive you instantly of life. Death may Surprise you when you least expect it. How many have gone to bed at

night in apparent good health, and in the morning have been found dead? And may not the same happen to you? Numberless others, who have been visited by sudden death, never expected to die in that manner; and, if they were then found in mortal sin, what is now their fate, and what will it be through all eternity? But, at all events, it is certain that either the night will come, when you will no more see the day, or the day will come, when you will no more see the night. “I shall come,” says Jesus Christ, “like a thief in the night, when I am the least expected.”—*Matt. xxiv. 44*. Your good master warns you of this beforehand, because he wishes your salvation. O sinner! correspond, then, with this mercy, profit by this admonition, hold yourself always in readiness for death. When that moment comes there will be no time for preparation. Consider well that you must certainly die. The scene of this world must soon terminate for you, though you know not when. Who can tell whether it will be within a year, within a month, within a week, or even whether you will be alive to-morrow? O my Jesus! give me light, and pardon me.

II.

Consider that, at the hour of your death, you will be extended on a bed, with your relatives and friends weeping over you, a priest to assist you, a lighted taper by your side, within one step of the terrible passage. Into eternity. Your head will be oppressed with pain, your eyes will become dim, your tongue parched with heat, your blood cooling in your veins, and your heart in agony: you will see the world passing from before you. No sooner will your soul become separated from your body than you will be stripped of all things, and cast into the earth to rot. There you will become the food of worms, which will gnaw and devour your flesh, and in a short time nothing will remain of your body but a few withered bones and a little dust. Open a grave, and take a view of the state of that rich and avaricious man! of that vain woman! Ah! Such is the termination of human life; such is the end of mortal man, and such will soon be yours. But penetrate with the eyes of faith into the other world,

and see the condition in which your soul will be placed. It will instantly be surrounded by the monsters of hell, representing before you all the sins that you have committed from your very childhood. At present the devil hides from you the malice of your crimes: he persuades you that there is little evil in this act of vanity, this indulgence, this resentment, this dangerous company; but in death he will display before your eyes the enormity of your sins, to make you despair. Then you will discover in the light of God himself the evil which you have committed in offending his infinite goodness. Ah! hasten then, whilst time remains, to make reparation for what is past: at the hour of death it will be too late.

III.

Consider that death is a moment on which eternity depends. Take a view of a man who is on the point of expiring, and reflect that he is just going to enter into one or other of the two eternities; his fate is pending but for a moment: when that is expired, he is either saved or condemned forever. O this last breath! O this moment on which depends an eternity!—an eternity either of torment or of glory; an eternity either always happy or always miserable; an eternity either of all that is good or of all that is evil; an eternity either of heaven or of hell. If you are then saved, you will be secure from all evils, and at the summit of happiness and content; if you are condemned, you will live in punishment and despair as long as God will be God, In death you will understand the meaning of heaven, hell, sin, an offended God, the contempt of divine laws, sins concealed in confession, ill-gotten goods unrestored, injuries not pardoned. “Unhappy me!” will the dying man say, “in a few moments I must appear in the presence of God. What will my sentence be? Whither shall I go? To heaven or to hell? Shall I be happy with the saints or burn with the damned? Shall I be a child of God or a slave of the devil? Alas! But a minute more and I shall know; and the destiny which I shall then receive will last for all eternity.” Then will you detest a thousand times the day on which you had the misfortune to

sin. But it will be too late; your sorrow will be fruitless, because it will proceed from the fear and not from the love of God. Ah, my God! from this hour I will turn to Thee: I will not delay my repentance until death. I now love Thee, I embrace Thee, and I wish to die in Thy embraces. O Mary! my true Mother, let me die under thy protection: help me at that critical and decisive moment.

MEDITATION FOR THURSDAY.

Judgment.

I.

Consider that the soul will no sooner have departed from the body than it will appear before the tribunal of God to be judged. This judge is the Almighty, whose wrath is provoked by your sins. Your accuser will be your mortal enemy, the devil; the matter of your trial will be your sins; your sentence will be without appeal; and if found guilty, your punishment will be hell. You will not have the power of calling your parents, friends, and companions to your aid: all must be concluded between God and your soul. You will then see the deformity of your crimes, and will not be able, as at present, to excuse them. You will be examined upon all your sins of thought, of words, of actions, of omissions, of scandal; you will be weighed in the terrible scales of divine justice, and, if found wanting in a single point, you are lost. My Jesus and my Judge, pardon me before Thou dost judge me.

II.

Consider that, at the end of the world, our bodies will rise again to participate in the reward or punishment of the soul according to our works, when all the nations of the earth will be assembled in the valley of Josaphat to be judged. If you are condemned, you will resume your body as an eternal prison for your unfortunate soul. At this sorrowful

reunion the soul will curse the body and the body the soul, so that, although at present they mutually consent to pursue unlawful pleasures, after death, they will become each other's tormentor. On the other hand, if you are saved, your body will arise beautiful, impassible, and glorious, and thus, both in body and soul, you will be judged worthy of eternal happiness. Thus will close the scene of this world: thus will terminate all the greatness, all the pleasures, and all the pomps of the earth. Yes, all will be at an end; nothing will remain but two eternities, one of glory, the other of pain; one of joy, the other of torments: the just will dwell in heaven, the wicked in hell, Woe, then, to him that has loved the world! woe to him that for the vain and fleeting pleasures of the earth has lost his soul,-his body, heaven, and God!

III.

Consider the eternal sentence which Jesus Christ will pass upon the reprobate and the elect. This sovereign Judge, turning towards the reprobate, will say: "Behold, ye ungrateful wretches, the event of your crimes! My hour is come—the hour of truth, of justice, of vengeance, and of wrath. Criminal souls, you have chosen my curse; let it fall upon you: be ye cursed for all eternity. Depart from me, despoiled of every good and laden with all evil, into eternal fire."¹ Then turning towards the elect Jesus will thus address them: "Come, ye blessed children of my heavenly Father, come and take possession of the kingdom of heaven which is prepared for you. Come, no longer to carry your cross after me, but to wear a crown. Come to inherit my riches, and to be the companions of my glory. Come from the land of exile to your true country; come from sufferings to glory, from tears to joy." O my Jesus! I hope to be one of those whom Thou wilt then bless. I love Thee above all things. Bless me at this moment. O my Mother Mary, do thou also bless me.

¹ "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem zternum."—Matt, xxv. 41.

MEDITATION FOR FRIDAY.

Hell.

I.

Consider that hell is a dreadful prison filled with fire. In this fire the reprobate are enveloped, having an abyss of fire above them, and around them and below them, in their eyes, their mouths, and throughout every part of their frame. There each sense suffers a torment peculiar to itself. The eyes are tormented with darkness and smoke, and at the same time by the sight of devils and damned souls; the ears hear nothing but continual howlings, lamentations and blasphemies; the smell is tormented by the stench of half-putrefied bodies; the taste by a burning thirst and cruel hunger, without the possibility of being alleviated by a drop of water or a morsel of bread. Hence proceed from those miserable captives, tears, groans, lamentations, howlings and despair; but all in vain: they will never obtain the smallest consolation under their torments, or the least mitigation of their pains. O hell, hell! shall we wait until we are buried in your flames to believe you and to fear you? And yet this is the conduct of thoughtless and unrepenting sinners. O you who are reading this, what is your state? were you to die this moment, whither would you go? Ah! you could not endure the pain of a spark of fire falling upon your hand, and have you the assurance to expose yourself to the hazard of burning in a pool of fire, in desolation and despair for all eternity?

II.

Consider the punishments that will be inflicted in hell on all the powers of the soul. The memory will be forever tormented with the recollection of sin, and with remorse of conscience; this gnawing worm will continually remind you that you have damned yourself for some miserable pleasure or interest. O God! what will the soul think of past pleasures, after hundreds, thousands, and millions of years spent in hell?

This gnawing worm will call to its recollection the time which God had given it for repentance, the means of salvation. wherewith he had furnished it, the good example which he had set before it, and the resolutions which it had formed, but would never execute. The soul will, moreover, see that its present state is irremediable. O God, O God! How terrible is hell, The will, also, will be eternally contradicted; it will never obtain what it wishes, and will always meet with what it would gladly avoid. The understanding will discover the greatness of the good which it has lost in losing heaven and God. O God! O God! pardon me, for the love of Jesus Christ.

III.

Sinner, you, who at present make small account of losing God, will discover your misfortune, when, you will see the elect triumph and exult with joy on their entrance into heaven, and yourself banished, like an unclean animal, from that blessed country, deprived forever of seeing the face of an infinitely amiable God, and separated from the company of Mary, of the angels and saints. Then, in fury and despair, you will exclaim: “O paradise of delights: O God of infinite goodness! Thou art not and never will be mine.” Repent, then; change your life; do not wait till the time of repentance is at an end. Give yourself, to God; begin truly to love him. Beg of Jesus and Mary to have pity on you.

MEDITATION FOR SATURDAY.

The Eternity of the Pains of Hell.

I.

Consider that the torments of hell will never terminate. The damned suffer in every way, and they suffer eternally. A hundred years of suffering will pass away, a thousand will pass away, and hell will still be only at its beginning. A hundred thousand and a thousand million of

years and ages will pass, and hell will still begin anew. Were an angel to be sent to one of the damned, informing him that, after as many million of ages have expired as there are drops of water in the sea, leaves upon the trees, and grains of sand on the seashore or upon the earth, he should be delivered from hell, this news would fill him with inconceivable joy: For although he would be compelled to suffer for an innumerable multitude of ages, still he would be able to say: The time will come when my sufferings will end. But alas! as many ages will really expire, and hell will be only at its beginning. Nay, this number of ages may be multiplied as many times as there are grains of sand on the earth, drops of water in the ocean, and leaves on the trees, and, at the close of this immense period, hell will begin again. There is not a wretch in that abode of torments, that would not willingly make this proposition to the Almighty. "Increase, O Lord, as much as Thou pleasest, my torments, prolong the duration of them to any extent Thou pleasest, provided they may terminate." But no: this termination will never be granted. It would be an alleviation, if the unfortunate sufferer could flatter himself with the hope that perhaps the Lord would one day have compassion on him and deliver him from hell. But alas! he will always keep the sentence of his eternal reprobation before his eyes, and will see that all these pains, this fire, this despair, these lamentations, will never cease, will never end. O hell! O eternity! how can men believe in you and yet continue in sin?

II.

Christian soul! pay attention to these truths: remember that hell is for you, if you live in sin. This horrible furnace is already enkindled under your feet, and numbers throughout the world are falling into it, whilst you are reading this. Reflect, that if the same misfortune ever befalls you, it will be irreparable; if ever, then, you did deserve hell, thank God with all your heart for his mercy in having spared you. Weep over your sins; employ every possible means of securing your salvation; frequently approach the sacraments; read daily some pious book, entertain a sincere

devotion to the Blessed Virgin, recite every day the Rosary, and fast every Saturday in her honor; be firm and resolute in resisting the beginning of temptation, invoking frequently the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary; flee from all occasions of sin; in short, use your utmost endeavors to avoid eternal misery, remembering that there cannot be too great security where eternity is at stake. Consider what numbers of men have hidden themselves in deserts, and shut themselves up in caverns, in order the more effectually to secure their eternal welfare. And what are you doing? Oh! give yourself sincerely to God, and say to him from your heart: Lord, behold I am now Thy servant: ready and willing to do whatever Thou commandest me. Mary, assist me.

END

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